

Al. Ringling Theatre
136 4th Avenue
Baraboo, Sauk County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WIS-261

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. WIS-261

THE AL. RINGLING THEATRE

Location: 136 4th Avenue, Baraboo, Sauk County, Wisconsin.
USGS Baraboo Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 16.278050.4816450

Present Owner: Baraboo Amusement Corporation, Leon C. Mudd, President.

Present Use: Movie Theatre, Revived Vaudeville Stage, and Playhouse.

Statement of Significance: The Al. Ringling Theatre is one of the first examples of palatial design applied to the moving picture theatre in this country. A touch of France in the Midwest, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in May 1976.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The Al. Ringling Theatre was opened on the evening of Wednesday, November 17, 1915.
2. Original and subsequent owners: Albert C. Ringling (1852-1916) was one of seven brothers, sons of August Frederick Rüngeling, an immigrant to the United States. Of the brothers, August G. (1854-1907) and Henry (1869-1918) never had much to do with the circus business, but the others, Charles (1863-1926), Otto (1858-1911), Alfred T. (1861-1919), and John, as well as Albert were to make their name, simplified to Ringling, synonymous with the American circus. The elder Rüngeling, a harness maker, moved with his family to Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin, some time in the 1860s. In 1873 Albert left home, moving to Brodhead to work in the Carriage and Wagon Factory and Blacksmith Shop of Antone Durner and Sebastian Laube. In his free time, Albert practiced circus acts and organized the local children into a little performing troupe. The first actual Ringling performance, where all five show-minded brothers took part, was presented in Manzomanie, Wisconsin, on November 27, 1882. Two brothers danced, two played instruments, and one sang. Albert became a juggler, John a clown. With their first profit of \$300 they bought evening suits and top hats.

On May 19, 1884, the Ringling Brothers were able to open their first real, if minimal, circus--traveling by wagon, and exhibiting the horse, a trained one, and a dancing bear. The start of their progress was slow. They had taken on veteran showman "Yankee" Robinson as partner, but Robinson died before the end of their first season. Four years went by before they obtained their first elephant. But their fortunes improved continually, and in 1890 their acts had to have railway cars for transportation. By 1900, Ringling Brothers had one of the largest shows on the road, and began absorbing other circuses, starting with that of John Robinson. They also acquired a half-interest in the Forepaugh-Sells show, and two years later they had it all. By the time they were able to buy out James A. Bailey's show, after Bailey's death in 1907, they had under their control the largest circus in America--the Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus, with its winter quarters in Baraboo.

In 1915 Al. Ringling built the Al. Ringling Theatre for the sum of \$100,000, intending to leave it as a gift to Baraboo. If it was an extravagant theatre for a town of that size, its character as a memorial was clear and recognized even as it was being built. Ringling was never really to see a show there. He was so nearly blind by opening night, his wife later recalled, that she had to describe to him the acts taking place on stage with the inaugural show. Less than a month and a half after opening night, Al. Ringling was dead. In 1918, Ringling winter quarters was moved to the old P. T. Barnum property in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and later to Sarasota, Florida. Today only their old winter quarters, now partially used as a museum; Al. Ringling's mansion, now the Elks Lodge headquarters; and the Al. Ringling Theatre, remain as living memorials to the most distinguished citizens of Baraboo.

After Al. Ringling's death, his widow was uninterested in owning the theatre, and so it passed into the control of the four surviving brothers. They offered it to the town of Baraboo for a municipal theatre, but the town council turned down the gift. As the brothers died, their interests passed to their heirs, to be eventually consolidated under the control of Henry Ringling, Jr., who operated the theatre until his death. At that time it was sold to a theatrical chain which later divested itself of its holdings by selling the building to their managers; in the case of the Al. Ringling, the manager was Ervin J. Clumb. In recent years ownership passed to Leon C. Mudd of the Baraboo Amusement Corporation.

3. Architects: Rapp & Rapp. The firm of C. W. Rapp (d. 1926) and George L. Rapp (1878-1949) was one of the largest in the country. Specializing in theatre architecture, this firm designed many of the nation's most lavish motion picture palaces.

George Rapp's first theatre job was as assistant to Edmund Krause in the design of the Majestic Theatre in Chicago. The Rapp brothers' first very large work was that for the new theatre production team of Balaban & Katz, with their Central Park Theatre in Chicago in 1917. Hall called this "the first real movie palace in the Middle West." The last Rapp & Rapp work was the rebuilding of the Fisher Theatre in Detroit in the 1950s. In between there were many major works, among them the Tivoli, Riviera, Uptown, Chicago, Palace, and Oriental in Chicago; the Paramount in Manhattan; Loew's Jersey in Jersey City, New Jersey; Loew's Penn in Pittsburgh; the Ambassador and the St. Louis in St. Louis, Missouri; the Palace in Cleveland, Ohio; the Fox in Washington, D. C.; and the Michigan in Detroit. Built about the same time as the Al. Ringling, and very similar to it in interior appearance, was the Orpheum in Champaign, Illinois. In addition to the theatres, Rapp & Rapp designed a number of major hotels and office buildings, and the simple shell for the unique Corn Palace in Mitchell, South Dakota.

The Al. Ringling's decor and the design of its auditorium, said to have been derived from Jacques-Ange Gabriel's Opéra of 1763-1770 in the Palace of Versailles, appear to be at least equally derived from the Grand Théâtre of 1777-1780 by Victor Louis at Bordeaux. A more usual inspiration for Rapp & Rapp theatres was the Italian Baroque manner, and if they lacked historical accuracy, in opulence they were seldom matched. The firm's design philosophy was stated by George Rapp himself:

Watch the eyes of a child as it enters the portals of our great theatres and treads the pathway into fairyland. Watch the bright light in the eyes of the tired shopgirl who hurries noiselessly over carpets and sighs with satisfaction as she walks amid furnishings that once delighted the hearts of queens. See the toil-worn father whose dreams have never come true, and look inside his heart as he finds strength and rest within the theatre. There you have the answer to why motion picture theatres are so palatial.

Here is a shrine to democracy where there are no privileged patrons. The wealthy rub elbows with the poor--and are better for this contact. Do not wonder, then, at the touches of Italian Renaissance, executed in glazed polychrome terra cotta, or at the lobbies and foyers adorned with replicas of precious masterpieces of another world, or at the imported marble wainscoting or the richly ornamented ceilings with motifs copied from master touches of Germany, France, and Italy, or at the carved niches, the cloistered arcades, the depthless mirrors, and the great sweeping staircases. These are not impractical attempts at showing off. These are part of a celestial city--a cavern of many-colored jewels, where iridescent lights and luxurious fittings heighten the expectations of pleasure. It is richness unabashed, but richness with a reason.

4. Builders and suppliers:
 - a. General contractors: Wiley Brothers, Chicago, Illinois.
 - b. Interior decoration: G. A. Brand Co., Chicago, Illinois.
 - c. Scenic curtains: Sosman & Landes, Chicago, Illinois.
 - d. Woodwork: C. L. Kleckner, Baraboo, Wisconsin.
 - e. Organ (original): Wurlitzer Organ Company, North Tonawanda, New York.
 - f. Organ installation: W. H. Aton Piano Company, Baraboo, Wisconsin.
 - g. Lighting fixtures: Victor S. Pearlman, Chicago, Illinois.
 - h. Lighting installation: Leslie C. Milner, Chicago, Illinois.
5. Original plans, construction, etc.: No original plans are known, however, the Baraboo Daily News of November 18, 1915, gives the following extensive description of the Al. Ringling Theatre:

THE THEATRE

The playhouse stands on Fourth Avenue on the site long occupied by the Wisconsin House, a Baraboo landmark. It faces the south, the courthouse park, and is on one of the finest streets in the city.

The building is as near fireproof as a theatre can be made. Brick, stone, cement and iron enter into its construction. The base of the exterior at the front is of fine polished marble and other parts of the front are of white marble and other material. The entrance is to the right, three stores below and three offices above occupying the west part of the front of the structure. The side walls and stage are of brick, cement and iron. Here are a few figures that may be of interest:

FACTS ABOUT THE THEATRE

Extreme length: 136 feet
Extreme width: 81 feet
Height at rear to top of ventilators: 70 feet
Height at front: 38 feet
Size of lobby: 20 by 24 feet
Width of foyer: 9 feet
Three stores below: 16 feet by 16 feet

Seating capacity: about 1,000
Seating capacity--main floor: 875
Seating capacity of 17 boxes, six each or 102.
Boxes are arranged in semi-circle in front of mezzanine floor.
Ladies waiting room: 14 by 15 feet
Three offices on second floor.
Stage: 74 by 31 feet
Dressing rooms: beneath stage.
Cars of bricks: 59 in building
Many cars of gravel, cement, iron and stone.
Largest girder: 12 tons
Cost: about \$100,000
Contractors: Wiley Brothers, Chicago

HEATING AND VENTILATING

The ventilating system will be of the best and rarely used in buildings of this size. The fresh air will be brought from the top of the auditorium through pipes to the heating plant in the basement where it will be heated in hot coils and forced by means of a fan to all parts of the auditorium. There will be a large number of ducts which will open beneath the chairs and other convenient places. The warm air will escape through two large ventilators over the stage. The heating plant in such a theatre costs about \$4,000 but on account of the elaborate system being used in the Al. Ringling theatre the cost will be about \$7,000.

THE DECORATIONS

The decoration of the interior of the theatre is unusually beautiful and effective. This work was in the charge of the G. A. Brand Co. of Chicago, W. Wilk of the firm acting as forman of a large number of painters and decorators. The mural decorations consist of a number of panels typifying joy, pleasure, delight and varying pleasurable human emotions. They are from the brush of Mr. Brand.

The boxes which extend entirely around the side and rear of the auditorium are separated by massive pillars. These pillars are covered with Dutch gold leaf in floral designs and above the boxes are floral garlands in plaster tinted in delicate majolica coloring. The ceilings throughout the building are in ivory. The woodwork aside from that in the auditorium which is entirely in gold leaf, is in ivory finish, the work having been done by C. L. Kleckner of Baraboo. The ladies reception room which opens from the mezzanine floor is artistically decorated in rose and grey and is approached by a white marble staircase. The plastico decoration in the lobby is especially effective, the floral designs being tinted in soft marionette colors. This ceiling is also used in the halls. The inviting appearance of the lobby is enhanced by a fountain of artistic design placed against the west wall.

The scenic curtains are the work of Sosman and Landes, scenic artists of Chicago. The draperies, carpets and upholstery are all in deep rose color which harmonizes well with the delicate coloring of walls and woodwork. The French style has been followed in the entire scheme of interior decoration being in harmony with the architecture of the building which is modeled from an opera house near Paris.

THE ORGAN

The W. H. Aton Piano Company installed the wonderful new Hope-Jones Unit Organ in the theatre. This was a strenuous job on account of the organ being placed in a small room built especially for it in the roof of the theatre. All of the parts of the instrument had to be hauled up on block and tackle, the total weight being some six tons. This plan

of placing the organ in the roof of the theatre is original with Mr. Ringling and the effect produced exceeds all expectations. No one can conceive where the music comes from, as it seems to come from the dome of the auditorium and from every direction instead of the direction of the organ. In playing this instrument some parts seem to come from the west side of the room behind the boxes, all combining and making a harmonious whole and even the softest, smallest pipe can be distinctly heard in every part of the house.

The actual work of installation was done by Robert Aton of the W. H. Aton Piano Company and Arthur Temple from the Wurlitzer factory.

If it is desired, all the effects known in the category of music can be summoned into being through the use of this instrument. The marching of soldiers, cheering of crowds, the calls of animals--all of those sounds which make the picture story more realistic are within the range of the Wurlitzer orchestra. There is practically no limit to the realism which may be given to the plays by this means.

Mechanically, the Wurlitzer orchestra is a marvel. It is electrically operated and controlled and unlike the ordinary organ it has a high pressure and instantaneous touch. Every organ tone may be had in greater power and a world of tonal achievements which no ordinary organ could compass are within its scope. It does not merely represent an orchestra, it is an orchestra with the same instruments all under the control of the master hand.

These instruments have been installed in many of the leading theatres of the world, including Cort Theatre, Chicago; Cort Theatre, New York; Vitagraph, New York; New Pitt Theatre, Pittsburgh; Casino and Hippodrome Theatres, Cincinnati; Germantown Theatre, Philadelphia; Imperial, Montreal; Beaver, Toronto; Liberty, Seattle; Regal, Rochester, N. Y.; Liberty, Spokane; Paris Theatre, Denver; and many others.

Different from many organs, this instrument can be played if desired by a music roll mechanically, making it possible to have the best of music whether there is a musician available or not. This was a special request of Mr. Ringling's. He did not want

to build this beautiful theatre without providing some way of having good music. The instrument must be heard to be appreciated and Baraboo people will have unlimited opportunity to enjoy the best of music at all times.

The W. H. Aton Piano Company has more than a local reputation for this kind of work, having installed theatre organs and automatic pianos in all parts of Wisconsin and Minnesota.

THE LIGHTS

The lighting fixtures have been installed in the new Al. Ringling Theatre and are as beautiful as found anywhere. The center one in the auditorium has forty-eight lights, trimmed in silk and verre de soie glass engraved panels. Each of the seventeen boxes has a Pearlman antique prevost finished light with a silk tassel on the stem. There are silk fixture lights in the ladies rest room and through the foyer are candelabra bracket lights trimmed with silk shades.

In the stairwell is a Pearlman design, cathedral glass panels. There are six tubular candelabra lamps inside. Many of the lights mentioned have gold wreaths on the outside design.

The lobby light is antique gold, finished with soft highlights. There is a calcite cut glass bowl, inverted top and three large lamps in the bottom. About the lamp is a laurel band of cast bronze hand done.

The fixtures are finer than in most theatres seldom one in Chicago being so rich in design, quality and finish. Victor S. Pearlman, 75 Adams Street, Chicago, designed the fixtures and they have been installed under the direction of Leslie C. Milner of the same city. The installation is an excellent piece of workmanship.

6. Additions and alterations: The original description fits in almost every detail the present appearance of the Al. Ringling Theatre. Only the following few alterations have been made to the structure:
 - a. The original slim iron and glass marquee was refaced, incorporating lighted attraction boards and the name of the theatre in large illuminated letters.

- b. The fountain was removed from the lobby and a candy counter put in its place. A door was cut through the west end wall of the lobby connecting it with the easternmost store, which now serves as the theatre office. The westernmost of the three pairs of double entrance doors was replaced with a sidewalk ticket booth, the original interior ticket booth being closed and used as a storage room.
- c. The original roll-player Wurlitzer organ was replaced in 1928 with a three-manual Barton pipe organ.
- d. The original seats were replaced with wider and more heavily upholstered ones. The ornamental row end panels were re-used so that the appearance of the seating retains its original character.
- e. The gas lighting fixtures which alternate with the electric lights in the foyer are said to be additions, fabricated in a foundry in nearby Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, to match closely the original electric fixtures.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

The opening of the Al. Ringling Theatre was hailed at the time as the greatest event in the history of Baraboo. The date was November 17, 1915, the show, Lady Luxury, a comic opera starring Florence Webber. E. G. Olson played the Wurlitzer organ. In attendance at the opening were all of the Ringling brothers with the exception of John, and Wisconsin Governor Emanuel L. Phillip, a native of Baraboo. The Governor spoke to the audience from his place of honor in the right hand proscenium box.

The praise that accompanied the opening of the theatre is typified by two items from the Baraboo Daily News of the following day; first is one of formal praise; the second an indirect reference to the theatre:

THE NEW THEATRE

It must be a source of gratification to Al. Ringling to know that his efforts in providing a playhouse in Baraboo is so much appreciated by his fellow townspeople. Every seat in the house was sold in four hours and hundreds were disappointed in not being able to be present at the first performance in order to show their appreciation to the one who made possible this fine building. Not only was the public demonstration in the park last summer a sincere mark of esteem but all along his thoughtfulness

has been mentioned far and wide in the most kindly manner. The erection of the building means pleasure for many thousands in Baraboo and the territory round about while the owner has felt a zest in the successful realization of his desire. Ever since the destruction by fire of the old opera house a number of years ago, there has been no adequate stage where actors could play well their parts, but now Baraboo has a place, the beauty of which few cities the size of Baraboo can boast. For the theatre going public, for the stage folk and for Mr. Ringling, the erection of the playhouse is more than a pleasing pleasure. It is a beautiful memorial to the days when Mr. Ringling as a boy in Baraboo enjoyed giving pleasure to others. He can feel today that the opening of his opera house marks a new era of enjoyment for him and his fellow townspeople.

TINTED PICTURES OF THEATRE GOWNS

Your picture, delicately colored, in the gown worn at the opening of the Al. Ringling Theatre, will be as priceless in the years to come as the old miniatures. Trimpey's studio is making appointments now for these pictures for Christmas gifts.

The Al. Ringling Theatre was built with the intention of providing Baraboo with a multi-purpose entertainment facility. Although for most of its existence it has been a moving picture theatre, it has complete provisions for stage performances. In the early years Baraboo was fortunate in being able to host touring companies of major Broadway productions which would pause at Baraboo en route to Minneapolis from either Chicago or Milwaukee. During the first fourteen years the Al. Ringling Theatre was in operation there were 109 touring shows presented on its stage. With the coming of sound pictures, such productions were discontinued, but the theatre's stage equipment remained intact, now providing facilities for annual productions by the Baraboo Theatre Guild, the National Shakespeare Company, and newly revived presentations of old-time vaudeville.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Important old views: A view of the building nearly completed was published in the Baraboo Daily News, November 18, 1915.

The original exterior and interior appearance of the theatre was reproduced in a pair of post cards, copies of which are preserved in the extensive theatre collection of Clark Wilkinson, Baraboo, Wisconsin.

2. Other: Interviews by Morrison with theatre historian Clark Wilkinson, Baraboo, 1970; by Mrs. Wheeler, 1976, with Don Evenson, then manager of the Al. Ringling Theatre, and Frederick Adam, Palo Alto, California, an early Rapp & Rapp design chief.

3. Bibliography:

The Baraboo Daily News, November 18, 1915.

Hall, Ben M., The Best Remaining Seats: The Story of the Golden Age of the Movie Palace. New York: Bramhall House, 1961, p. 141.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural interest and merit: The Al. Ringling Theatre is probably the earliest theatre in the country that can accurately be called a "movie palace." In a day when American theatre design generally was based on the 19th-century New York playhouses, this theatre, its design derived with comparative stylistic accuracy from the Opera House in the Palace of Versailles, pointed the way to the great palatial theatres of the following decade. It was in complete contrast to the small "nickelodeons" and the rather barren neighborhood moving-picture theatres typical of the times.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is practically unaltered and is kept in a near-perfect state of maintenance.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Layout, shape, and massing: The building, 81 feet wide by 136 feet deep, is rectangular in shape, virtually filling the site. The front portion is occupied by stores, offices, and the theatre entrance. Behind them is the auditorium with the stage at the very rear. The building is a low rectangular block, with a tall stage loft rising at the rear. The elliptical wall of the auditorium block rises through the surrounding roof and abuts the front of the stage loft. The block containing the projection booth is located on the roof of the office section abutting the front end of the auditorium upper wall.
2. Number of stories: The office section of the building is two stories high. The auditorium rises considerably higher.

3. Wall construction, design, and decoration: The street facade is four bays wide, finished in gray terra cotta over a dado of polished granite. The wooden trim is painted white. The left three bays, identical in design, contain storefronts with office windows above. The right bay is the theatre entrance. It is said that Mr. Ringling's original intent was to duplicate the storefront bays to the right of the theatre entrance, placing the entrance at the center of a seven-bay building, but that the necessary land was unavailable.

The left three bays are defined by paneled piers which support a continuous entablature. The piers are set on polished granite bases. The panels are outlined by bell-flower moldings, and at the top of each is a pendant bell-flower motif. The friezeless entablature consists of a three-banded architrave, ornamented at intervals with raised disks. Above the architrave are a cyma reversa and a row of dentils. A wooden trellis resting on slim projecting brackets takes the place of a cornice. Above the trellis, the unornamented parapet wall has a slightly projecting coping.

At the first floor level there is a store front with a large plate glass show window and recessed door of standard design within each bay. The westernmost bay also contains the stairway to the second-floor offices. Above each show window, extending the width of the bay, is a tripartite small-paned glazed transom of 12-21-12 lights. The spandrel panels between floors are of gray terra cotta, containing a recessed panel with a raised diamond-shaped ornament over each of the mullions which divide the transoms below.

At the second-story level, the tripartite arrangement of the fenestration is continued, here made up of pairs of French windows separated by unfluted Renaissance Ionic engaged columns. Between the columns, and protecting the openings, are ornamental iron railings of simple design. The central windows contain 15 panes each, while the outer ones contain ten. Above each pair of windows is a low glazed transom, with panes equal in size to those in the windows below.

The eastern bay is the entrance to the theatre, and is treated with great elaboration. To either side, a pair of rusticated Renaissance Ionic pilasters (flanked by paneled piers identical to those described above) is set on a high polished granite base. The pilasters contain recessed panels framed by bell-flower moldings, the narrow alternating courses breaking forward of this pattern, and each block bearing its own inscribed central rectangle. The

volutes of the capitals are connected by small floral festoons. Each pilaster pair supports an entablature segment of a four-stage architrave and a wide frieze containing two projecting disks with an overdraped, ribboned, floral garland, and denticulated, enriched modillioned cornice. In the span between the pilaster pairs, the cornice and low parapet break upward to form a semi-circular arch. To either side of the arch, over each pilaster pair, is a heavy block pedestal, its outer edge in the form of a volute, repeated in a set-back facing outward. Pedestal fronts show bound floral garlands and C-scrolls, and on each pedestal, an elaborate tetrapod supports a plain stone sphere.

Within the bay, the theatre entrance consists of three pairs of glazed wooden doors, painted a brownish purple color. They are topped by a tri-part segmental arched transom, glazed with mirrors. In recent years, the left pair of doors has been replaced with a ticket booth of transparent and opaque glass, the opaque panel matching the purple color of the doors. Above the transom is the projecting marquee. Above the marquee, at the second-story level, is a wide, four-part window, the inner sections being a pair of French windows. The window unit, with a three-centered arched top, is divided by a transom bar at the spring line. The windows are glazed with small panes. To each side of the second-floor window opening, and continuing upward under the curve of the cornice, is a plain band with the inscription, "AL · RINGLING · THEATRE ·" following the curve. In the tympanum between the high semi-circular arch and the lower four-centered arch of the window there is a large, egg-shaped cartouche, unornamented except for a small bell-flower pendant at its top. Its narrow molded frame is scrolled to accommodate a diminutive cartouche still higher. To either side is a curved-sided triangular recessed panel with a wide molded frame.

The side and rear walls of the main building mass, the side walls of the stage loft, and the sides of the upward projection of the auditorium walls are of pink common brick laid up in common bond. The walls of the projection booth, the street end of the auditorium wall, and the front of the stage loft are of dark red face brick with projecting belt courses and projecting and recessed ornamental panels. They have a heavy white terra cotta coping.

4. Marquee: Projecting above the segmental arched transom of the entrance, the marquee was originally a slim canopy of iron and glass in the form of a segmental curve. The present marquee now contains illuminated lettering and attraction panels in a high metal and glass parapet.

5. Chimneys and ventilators: There is a small rectangular brick chimney at the southwest corner of the stage loft. Atop the stage loft are two massive ventilators, square in plan, with widely overhanging hipped hoods. Smaller, round ventilators are located on the roof of auditorium and projection booth.
6. Roof: All roofing is of built-up composition material. The roofs of the stage loft, office section and projection booth are flat. The auditorium is covered with a hipped roof of a moderate height.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans: The center of the rectangular building mass is occupied by the auditorium, elliptical in form, with its north end cut flat by the straight proscenium wall. The auditorium is surrounded at both the first and second-floor levels by a horseshoe-shaped passageway which serves as a small foyer at the rear, narrowing as it nears the front of the auditorium. Behind the foyer, opening to the street, are three stores. In the easternmost bay, in place of a store, is the small elliptical entrance lobby. Above this is the ladies' waiting room, now furnished as an office. The main stairway is located in the southeast corner of the foyer, immediately inside the lobby doors. There is a small curving secondary stairway at the north end of the eastern arm of the horseshoe which gives direct access to the proscenium box at stage left.
2. Architectural and decorative treatment of interior spaces:
 - a. Lobby: The lobby is a small elliptical room, approximately 14' x 16' in size, with its long axis parallel to the street. The floor, originally carpeted, is covered with alternating black and white composition tiles. The circumference of the room is divided into eight bays, the three at either end being of approximately equal width, those on the long sides somewhat wider. The bays are defined by unornamented shallow pier pilasters which extend through the wide frieze surrounding the room. Each of the two wide bays has three sets of paired glazed wooden doors opening to the street or to the auditorium foyer, respectively. In the west end bay is a door to the adjoining store, now used as the theatre office. The door is balanced at the east end of the lobby by a large mirror in a bronze frame. The intermediate "corner bays" contain bronze-framed display panels. The walls are of cream-colored plaster above a white veined marble base. The lobby is surrounded by a wide decorative terra cotta frieze.

The lowest element of this is a series of bay-wide horizontal rinceau panels separated at each pilaster by a recessed rectangular panel with central rosette. The major part of the frieze is a repeated series of approximately square segments, copied from the frieze sculpted by Luca della Robbia for the choir gallery of the Old Sacristy of the Cathedral of Florence, now located in the Cathedral Museum. This section of the frieze, too, is interrupted at the pilasters by sections containing recessed egg-and-dart bordered rectangular panels. Each of the pilaster panels is draped with a floral garland in delicately and naturalistically tinted terra cotta. Above the relief panels is a leaf molding, again broken at the pilaster points, above this an egg-and-dart molding, and above that a wave molding which forms the bottom of the ceiling cove. The wide cove which rings the ceiling is divided into panels reflecting the bay division of the walls. The pilaster axes are continued as vertical leaf moldings which separate panels of treillage infill in classical enframements. Above and below these panels are bound leaf moldings in green terra cotta, the upper molding continuous around the room, the lower one broken into segments by the panel frames. Superimposed upon the end bay panels are flower baskets in high relief, the flowers naturalistically polychromed. Surrounding the central panel of the ceiling is a molding of polychromed flowers and within it a wide reticulated band. The field of the painted ceiling represents sky with cherubs floating among the clouds. One of the cherubs carries a cartouche bearing the AR monogram. At the center of the ceiling, hanging from a plaster rosette, is a bronze and glass light fixture, an inverted truncated cone in form with a translucent white bowled bottom. An inverted, curved conical interior reflector provides concealed indirect lighting to the room. A small ornamental fountain which originally occupied the west end of the room has been removed in recent years and replaced by a candy counter.

- b. Foyers: The horseshoe-shaped foyers which surround the auditorium at both the main floor and mezzanine levels are decorated in a rather restrained manner. The mezzanine foyer has a low chair rail with panels above and below. The ground color of the panels is dull gold with a stencilled pattern in gray. The woodwork which occupies most of the remaining wall area is painted light cream. The ceiling is divided into a series of coved panels which are painted pink, the coves decorated with anthemion and flower cluster motifs and painted a metallic gold. The main floor foyer is similar in treatment. As the ceiling is lower,

the chair rail and lower panels are omitted. The ceiling cove ornamentation is less elaborate and is painted entirely in dull gold. Both foyers taper in width, terminating at the proscenium wall in a semi-circular niche of small dimension. Lighting is provided by silk-shaded candle sconces on the side walls and acorn-shaped bronze and pebbled glass pendant lanterns. In the lower foyer the lanterns are lighted alternately by electricity and gas.

- c. Auditorium: The auditorium is a truncated ellipse in plan with a gently sloping floor and a flat, level ceiling surrounded by a wide cove. The sides and rear are surrounded by a 15-bay oval engaged Corinthian colonnade. In lieu of a balcony there are 17 boxes projecting between the columns. The columns are set on paneled pedestals which vary in height with the slope of the floor, the rearmost columns resting directly on the floor. The lower portions of the columns have enriched stopped fluting. The entablature, which completely surrounds the auditorium, is composed of architrave, frieze with draped disk ornament above each column, and enriched denticulated modillion cornice. From each of the wall segments within the inter-columniations, at approximately mid-height, projects a semi-elliptical box. The boxes are stepped down to follow the main floor slope. Each box front is decorated with a rinceau and a central cartouche with a molded figure on either side. The rectangular opening to the main floor beneath each box is surrounded by a rope molding. The sides of the enframing are enriched with the guilloche, the top with leaf panels. The openings are draped in dark red with gold trim and on either side is a silk-shaded single candle sconce. The openings to the boxes are more rich in treatment. They also have the surrounding rope molding and the horizontal bay leaf panel above the opening. Above this there is a hood ornamented with egg-and-dart and bead-and-reel moldings and fluting, and supported by two enriched consoles. Since the hoods are all at the same level and the box levels vary, an additional horizontal panel is inserted within the rope molding of the forward boxes. This panel contains a recessed central panel with a small central wreath. The panel is framed with Greek key and bead moldings. Above each of the door hoods is a cartouche garlanded with polychromed plaster flowers.

The proscenium boxes flanking the stage are treated with exceptional grandeur. They are smaller than the other auditorium boxes, each containing only four seats.

They are narrower and have gilded balustrades in place of the ornamented parapet walls which front the other boxes. To either side of each box is a pair of free-standing Corinthian columns, with enriched stopped fluting, set on a common pedestal. The columns support the main entablature of the room, which is broken forward over them. Above the entablature, in front of the ceiling cove, is a broken segmental pediment with an elaborately garlanded cartouche. Within the space framed by the columns is the rectangular opening to the box set below an arched architrave, the tympanum decorated with a Greek key molding and a central wreathed disk. Above the arch is the garlanded cartouche motif used above the auditorium boxes. Each of the 17 boxes in the room is lighted by a vasiform etched glass light ornamented with a metal pendant tassel, and suspended from a plush-sheathed chain.

The main entablature continues across the front wall of the auditorium forming the top of the proscenium opening. It is supported at either side of the stage by a cluster of supports (a pilaster, an anta, and an engaged column) which fills the space between the stage and the side wall of the auditorium. The entablature, recessed across the stage opening, is broken forward over each support cluster. Above the entablature and equal in height to the ceiling cove, which it replaces, is a deeply recessed panel framed by a very low, wide three-centered arch. The panel within the arch contains a large central disk with the AR monogram flanked by two panels framed with a wide ornamental banding. Each of these panels contains a central patera flanked by a pair of smaller molding-framed panels. The fascia of the arch is composed of the architrave surrounding the panel recess, a flat band ornamented with an applied series of polychromed floral swags, and a bound leaf molding at the line of juncture with the ceiling. The architrave is broken by a series of panels containing bearded faces in high relief.

The ceiling is surrounded by a wide cove of mural panels corresponding to the intercolumniations below and separated by ribs decorated with molded polychromed flowers, the ribs corresponding with the columns. The murals depict cherubs sporting among the clouds, representing "joy, pleasure, delight, and varying pleasurable emotions." Over the proscenium boxes the ribs continue to follow the column placement creating a tri-part panel arrangement. Over the left box the panels continue the cloud treatment, while over the right box they contain plaster-ornamented grilles concealing the organ chamber behind.

The ceiling itself is flat and level, composed of two large concentric elliptical bands with a circular central element. The outer band is painted as the sky, and the inner field is painted dull gold. The areas are separated by a bound leaf molding. The circular centerpiece contains a radial grille ornamented with polychromed floral swags. It is lowered slightly from the ceiling plane. Near it, in the field of the ceiling, are four very small floral medallions. The centerpiece supports a chandelier with 24 candle fixtures on brackets of alternately long and short projection surrounding a shallow central bowl of silk panels in a metal and gesso frame.

- d. Ladies' waiting room: Opening from the mezzanine foyer and occupying the space immediately above the entrance lobby is a suite of rooms once used as a ladies' lounge area, now furnished as an office but not used. The entrance to the rooms opens from a raised, balustraded bay recessed into the rear wall of the foyer. The bay is flanked by a pair of Corinthian antae decorated with rinceau panels. At the top of the five semi-elliptical black-veined white marble steps that lead to the entrance level is a pair of paneled pedestals, each of which supports a wide fluted urn. The pedestals are joined to the antae by railings, the area beneath the handrails filled by a solid panel with a round central hole framed by a narrow leaf molding. Within the bay the west wall is occupied by a narrow segmental-arched door glazed with mirrors, the door giving access to the projection booth ladder. The east wall contains a mirrored artificial door of identical design. The entrance to the waiting room is a glazed double door within a segmental-arched frame centered opposite the steps. Each door contains fifteen panes of glass set between double-curved horizontal muntins. To either side of the door is a framed panel identical in treatment to those in the foyer. The walls, ceiling and woodwork continue the decorative scheme of the foyer.

The main parlor is in the French Renaissance style. The floor is carpeted, the walls smoothly plastered. There is a low chair rail with framed panels in the dado and large panels of textured plaster above. The walls are painted in two tones of cream. The ceiling is framed by a narrow cove trimmed with polychromed bay leaf moldings and containing a continuous series of small naturalistically polychromed floral swags. Small-paned mirrored doors connect the room with a two-stall toilet room to the east and with another large room, now furnished as an office, to the west. This second

room is in the American Georgian style. It contains a fireplace with crossetted architrave, pulvinated frieze, and denticulated cornice as a mantel shelf. The doors joining it with the first room are single-paneled and there is a simple chair rail. The walls are of smooth plaster, most of which has been covered with mirror panels. The woodwork is painted antique cream.

3. Furnishings:

The auditorium seating has been altered but preserves the character of the original. In the original arrangement the seats had wooden backs, and the first 14 rows held cushions of red plush with the AR monogram in a laurel wreath embroidered in gold. The rear ten rows were upholstered in a plainer material. The ends of the rows had armrests on cast-iron panels decorated with female busts and the AR monogram. These row ends have been retained in the present seating, which is more heavily cushioned and more commodious in size than the original, and is upholstered entirely in dark red plush. The capacity of the theatre is now approximately 800, including 85 individual gilded opera chairs in the boxes.

The original gold-trimmed maroon drapery remains throughout the auditorium at the entrances to the boxes and the main floor and over the stage. In order to accommodate the present large projection screen the proscenium drape has been folded back on itself, but has not been permanently altered.

The Sosman and Landes Company of Chicago painted the theatre's asbestos fire curtain. It bears, in a wide "gesso" frame, a full-color painting titled "Serenade Au Petit Trianon," in which three small boats are shown arriving at what purports to be Marie Antoinette's Hameau, or rustic hamlet, near the Petit Trianon at Versailles. Two boats carry courtiers, and a third contains musicians who serenade two young ladies on the balcony of a building meant to be "Marlborough's Tower" at the French queen's Dairy.

D. Site and Surroundings:

The theatre faces south on Fourth Avenue, one of the major downtown streets of Baraboo, Wisconsin. Opposite the theatre is the central square of the town, occupied almost entirely by the Sauk County Courthouse and its annex. The theatre fronts on a concrete sidewalk. There is no landscaping.

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Architect
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and
Lucy Pope Wheeler
Writer/Editor
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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This Al. Ringling Theatre documentation was prepared as part of a Historic American Buildings Survey project to record representative examples of theatre design in the United States during the first third of the 20th century. Begun under James C. Massey, former HABS Chief, it was carried out under the general supervision of Dr. John Poppeliers, succeeding Chief of the Survey since 1972. Photographs are by Douglas C. Green, Waukesha, Wisconsin, for the Historic American Buildings Survey. This manuscript includes some data added from HABS research in 1976 and was edited in 1978 by Denys Peter Myers, HABS Architectural Historian.